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Preparatory Committee
Second session,
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Item 5 of the provisional agenda

PROVISIONAL AGENDA FOR THE WORLD CONFERENCE AND RELATED DOCUMENTATION

Page

RECOMMENDATIONS SUBMITTED BY NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN CONSULTATIVE STATUS 2

International Women's Tribune Centre 2

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RECOMMENDATIONS SUBMITTED BY NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN CONSULTATIVE STATUS

International Women's Tribune Centre

1. The International Women's Tribune Centre, on behalf of the organizations listed in the annex, is sending this document to accompany the boxes of petitions gathered by women from 60 countries representing all regions of the world. The petitions, signed by 65,000 people, request the 1993 United Nations World Conference on Human Rights to "comprehensively address women's human rights at every level of its proceedings" and specifically call upon it to recognize that "violence against women violates human rights".

2. This initiative emerged out of the growing concern on the part of many around the world that women's rights are not viewed as full and critical human rights matters. In particular, we believe that the massive violence in women's daily lives constitutes one of the most pervasive and insidious, yet least recognized, violations of human rights in the world today. This petition drive began on 25 November, International Day Against Violence Against Women, and has been adopted by grass roots groups around the world. It has been translated into 10 languages, reproduced in numerous publications, passed around at demonstrations, in classrooms, at meetings and in development projects. Signatures have arrived on individual postcards, by fax, in hand-delivered envelopes from places as diverse as Korea, Germany, Costa Rica, Sudan and India, and in special delivery boxes, such as the 20,000 from Turkey.

3. Our requests to the Preparatory Committee are both general and very specific.

4. First, we ask that the World Conference on Human Rights "comprehensively address women's human rights at every level of its proceedings". The specific situation of women should be examined in relation to every agenda item. This means not only a separate session on women, but a systematic effort to integrate a gender perspective into all discussions of civil and political as well as socio-economic rights. By adopting a gender perspective, we mean looking specifically at how the human rights of women are violated and at how human rights violations often affect men and women differently. This requires in-depth consideration of the specific shape that differences in the treatment of men and women take, with a view toward eliminating the discriminatory aspects of the differences. For example, in discussing political prisoners it is important to document and highlight the sexually determined facets of torture and imprisonment; likewise, an assessment of the right to development should include an examination of how malnutrition or land rights affect women in distinct ways.

5. As the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women requested, the World Conference should "emphasize that women's equality is a significant human rights issue and, to this end, attention should be given to the extent to which this issue has been addressed effectively by the

implementation methods and mechanisms under human rights covenants and conventions" (CEDAW/C/1992/L.1/Add.14). This process requires detailed examination of the failure of existing procedures to protect and promote women's human rights at all levels.

6. Towards this end, background material prepared by the secretariat for the Conference should include information on the specific impact of the issues on women. Such material is often not readily available and needs to be gathered in consultation with women's groups and other non-governmental organizations, such as international human rights groups. The secretariat could also request that Governments include specific data on women in preparing their documentation.

7. Second, we are specifically requesting that the Conference consider "gender violence, a universal phenomenon which takes many forms across culture, race and class", and that such violence "be recognized as a violation of human rights requiring immediate action". The forms of violence women suffer are many and various, but they all deomonstrate a consistent disregard for the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that "everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person" (art. 3) and that "no one shall be subject to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" (art. 5).

8. Yet women have these rights violated everyday through the pervasiveness of gender violence. As CEDAW stated in its general recommendation No. 19 on violence against women (eleventh session, 1992), "gender-based violence is a form of discrimination which seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men". Gender-based violence is that "which is directed against a woman because she is a women or which affects women disproportionately. It includes acts which inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty" (CEDAW/C/1992/L.1/Add.15). We urge the Preparatory Committee to ensure that the Conference addresses such violence as a vital human rights concern.

Annex

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN CONSULTATIVE STATUS
WHICH HAVE CO-SIGNED THE DOCUMENT

Category I

International Alliance of Women
International Council of Women
International Federation of Business and Professional Women
Soroptimist International
Women's International Democratic Federation
Zonta International

Category II

International Abolitionist Federation
International Association of Women in Radio and Television
International Council of Jewish Women
International Federation of University Women
Pan-Pacific South-East Asia Women's Association
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts
World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession
World Federation of Methodist Women

Roster

European Union of Women
International Women's Tribune Centre
Third World Movement Against the Exploitation of Women